

ACTÆON
AND OTHER POEMS

JOHN ERSKINE

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AND OTHER POEMS

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BY

JOHN ERSKINE

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TO
MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER

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ACTÆON

*'Tis memory gives
The immortal part by which man lives.*

WILD EDEN

FAIR bloomed the happy world, fair bloomed
the May,

But over Lethe came no bloom nor change,
Only the ancient languor; soft and smooth,
Save where a slumbrous poppy, nodding low,
Trailed into ripples, Lethe slipped away;
And there the dead, fresh from the bright world,
came,

And drank forgetfulness — one cup for all,
Whether their crown of life were flower or
thorn,

Their draught of life proved sweet or bitter wine.
There statesmen, soldiers, leaders of their times,
Heart-worn with blazing out new paths for truth,
Drank with their meanest follower, side by side ;
Two lovers there, one with the passionate kiss
Of sweet lips clinging, one in patient love
Of those same lips, which never might be his,
Together drank, and equally forgot ;
Thither came joy and sorrow ceaselessly,
And straight passed over, levelled unto peace.

But with them came a spirit not for peace ;
All violently, as one half crazed, he came
Down to the banks of Lethe. There he stood ;
As some true arrow, springing from the bow,
Cleaves a long arch, then quivers in the gold,
So fled the spirit to the banks and stood.
A moment so ; then to the dead cried out :

“What drink ye here?” And one in answer
told,

All stammering for amazement, of the stream
That stills the love of life, and sweetens death
With pure forgetfulness. Then rang that land
And loud re-echoed with the strangest voice,
The strangest cry, that ever startled hell:

“Better a life of torture, death of shame,
And sorrow lasting on to many deaths,
Than peace for me, bought by forgetfulness!”

He stood erect, the rough wild hair blown back,
As from swift running; at his heart one hand,
The other raised as if to warn the dead
From Lethe; and his face — more than the light
Of life and youth and May burned in that brow
And flushed those lips, pain-set; his eyes seemed
blind

Of glory, as from gazing on the sun.
As when a tree falls prone across a brook,
And gathers up its waters to a pool,
So rose the startled dead around him there,
And wondered at him.

Then a woman spoke :

“Wouldst thou remember now? When the
light goes,

Why lay another shadow on the dark?

Has sorrow met thee? There are double scars
For wounds remembered; here no memory
lives;

No more thy thought shall cling to what is
gone —

How can the ivy climb when the house falls?”

He almost smiled, for pity; then there flamed
Fire in his eyes, and his heart filled his voice.

“Oft as I hunted through the summer woods,
The wind would fly with me and spur me on,
The low pine-sweetness urge me, fern and flower
Lean to my flight, and whisper after me,
Till the whole forest fell to murmuring
Of sounds that echoed clearer than the pack,
And followed something swifter than the deer.
But when I rested breathless, at the noon,
The whole world came to silence suddenly,
With one refrain still lasting on to haunt me
Of what the woods sang:

‘Every flower of the world
Waits to be gazed on; all the honey of the earth
Waits to be gathered; no forbidden sweets,
And no forbidden beauty.’

So befell

This morning, that I hunted till the noon,

And thirsting, came upon a forest pool,
A silver mirror where the sun looked in.
I came a-tiptoe, for the forest song
Was on me — ‘ All the honey of the earth ’ —
when, hark !

A whirl of laughter never brook could sing,
Though silver pebbles teased it into song.
O perilous music ! Marvelling I stood
For one dear moment, dreaming not at all
To break the age-long privacy of gods ;
But then the breeze stirred — ‘ Every flower of
the world ’ —

O the music, O the wild refrain
That rapt my soul ! I drew the leaves apart —
I looked on Dian !

Knee-deep in the pool,
So white against the forest ; all her hair

Falling in tangles, dark against the white,
And dripping silver in the noonday sun.
She raised her eyes, the swift blush covered her,
One divine rose burning with terrible fire.
Lightly she dipped her fingers in the pool,
And lightly flung the silver in my eyes,
And all amazed to be so gently used,
Still poring on her beauty, all at once
I felt the bow and quiver slip my fingers;
My hand was as the hoof of some great stag;
A hairy covering fringed my eyes, and clothed
My limbs with awful change; then keen I felt
The branching antlers cleave my brow, and knew
A sudden trembling, not like human fear,
Bite at my heart.

She watched me, still as death,
Nor longer cared to screen herself; the blush

Fell from her face like the deep set of sun,
That brings the stars out cold; but as I looked,
Her beauty grew and kindled in the cold,
Until my heart broke into fire before it,
And the fear passed away.

I heard the pack
Crying; deep pity changed her look. I knew,
But left her not, so marvellous the pity
That drew her eyes to mine. They slew me there,
My own poor hounds, but, ere I fell, I saw
Her face grow sorrowful. How can I forget
That divine face? Ye may forget, but I
Gazed once on beauty till her glance grew kind,
Suffered the cost of it, drank of the bliss,
And evermore remember."

High the voice
Rang o'er that dismal country, triumphing,

And a great glory flushed Actæon's face.
But ere the silence half resumed itself
Back from the echo, turned the spirit band
Incredulous, forth to their flight again.

As when strong rising waters burst the dam,
Sweep clear the river-bed, and only leave
One stubborn buttress stiff against the flood,
So stood Actæon while the dead rushed by.

“One draught of Lethe for a world of pain?
An easy bargain; yet I keep the thorn,
To keep the rose. I will remember Dian;
If I forget, who shall remain to tell
What beauty was? Perchance the gods have
kept
Some unillumined corner of deep hell
To brighten with this memory. This I know:
They have no power to take her from me, more

Than she could keep me from her in the world,
Nor death could keep me ! ”

Slowly turned he then
Where the dark country sleeps beneath the
gloom ;

And as he went, the glory of his face
Spread gleams before him, like the coming
dawn —

Trailed brightness after, like the fading day ;
And when he passed, the quiet gloom returned.

IPHIDAMUS

*Far from his wedded wife, helping the folk of
the city — far from his bride.*

ILIAD, XI, 242.

YOUNG Iphidamus, son of Antenor,
Woody bright-eyed Theano, his boyhood love,
All summer long, and in the harvest days
Won her and brought her home, a happy bride,
Northward, over the sea, to far-off Thrace.
There on the shore his lonely roof was set
Bordering the dunes, storm-beaten, and below,
The never-tiring breaker crashed and roared.
The sloping sands, wave-wrinkled and untrod,
Now kissed the feet of Theano, when she first
Gladdened the house, under the bridal stars,

And the warm hearth blazed welcome through
the door.

Young Iphidamus, drunken deep of love,
Mourned not the summer gone, the failing year ;
For Theano in his heart, Demeter-like,
Brought greenness on the barren sands, and
kindling

A warmer glory in the Thracian dawns,
Drew purple o'er the wave, grey with the winter.
The hearth that once flamed lonely to the skies,
Now sang of human comfort, and the girlish
Music, Theano's laughter, made her love
Hear not the broken sea. The thin young moon,
The silver-eyed, rose wondering on their joy,
And shining larger, found no love like theirs
From shore to shore. But all too soon she
waned ;

And ere the nights were dark, their joy was dead.

A Greek-born wanderer, resting at their door,
Grown thankful over generous meat and wine,
Paid them but ill, the idle woe-bringer !

“ Friends, have ye made the mercy of the gods
So welcome, it will never dwell elsewhere ?

How lightly here the breath of Eros moves,
Stirring the quiet air to music low ;

But all my land bows to one gust of war,

As on the forest falls the bitter North,

Bending one way the marsh-flag and the pine.

Now all the sails of Hellas, raised in wrath,

Are set for Troy ; false Helen and her love

Look seaward now, and count how many wings

Urge on the will of the rewarding gods.

Lo, now the seamen prop the dripping keels

High on the beach ; the Argive spear is loosed,

And with it flies a swift unlovely sleep
For Trojan eyes; or in the reddened night
The glaring camp-fires through the Achaian
host

Wake Paris from his dreams. Even, it may be,
Old Priam, fallen poor of younger arms,
Hides the white beard under the coat of bronze
To pace the shaken walls."

He spoke the words:

And Theano listened sorrowful, with her eyes
Full of the grief of war; but ere he ceased,
On her the woe was fallen.

For now no more
Had Iphidamus pleasure, as of old,
In word of love or laughter, but his eyes
Followed her ever, restless with bright fear.
He found no comfort in the hearth — moodily

Stared at the flame unbrightened. The wave-
worn beach

All day he paced, revolving anguished thoughts,
Like one whose heart two purposes besiege;
And when against the sky some wide-winged gull
Flashed like a sail over the last billow,
Long would he watch its flight; and in his face,
Like carrion-ravens, trouble circled dark,
Low-brooding o'er the battle in his soul.

There came a sullen day in the late year,
Dim with low clouds, blown huddling from the
North,

And then at last his spirit bowed itself
To one possessing purpose. Down the coast
He called his men, old lovers of the sea,
Scarred from the fierce embrace of boisterous
waves,

Brave hearts that found their hope in bleak sea-
dawns.

Swiftly they shouldered down the unpropped
keels,

Freighted with arms and gifts, where the flood-
tide

With every wave more rudely tossed the bows,
And where the cliff robbed nothing of the wind.

Young Iphidamus, stricken sore of woe,
Turned from the ships, the seamen at their oars,
The rocking masts that spread out hungry arms
Wide-yearning to the wind — and climbed the
steps

To Theano, where she waited at the door.

She had no welcoming smile, but took his kiss
Quietly, and the words:

“O weep not, Theano!

Though with great mischief work the gods their
will.

They drive the plough of anger, and uproot
All slowly-blossoming, easy-blasted flowers;
The joy of man they spare not. Was it I
Forgot the hungry days of love, expecting
The honey and the wine for evermore?
The dreadful Three have cloven the single thread,
And weave us separate fates. O bride beloved,
How can I leave thee? Not for lack of love
I go — thou canst not doubt — no lack of love!
Thou art my wisest goddess and most fair!
O, having thee, my wealth a hundred times
Outweighs the thrones of Hera! Having thee
I could not go: but thee I have no more.

That day when he, the raven-throated, told
His evil tale of Helen and her wars,

And Priam stricken, shorn of friends — I turned
A selfish ear, and said, ‘He needs not me!
Truly, my father’s guest-friend, unto whom
My blood beats loyal and I owe it all,
But now he cannot ask it! Lonely souls
With no fair face to live for, let them die
A happy death for Helen; but for me
Love pours the cup of life, wine of desire:
I will not take away my lips.’

O Theano!

I chose the eagle-flight alone with thee,
Far above call of friend or stroke of foe;
I chose; perchance the stern-eyed gods prepare
A blight for inward-yearning love, or else
Joy clutched too hard will crumble; but no more
Delight of dawn was mine, when the young day
Came stirring at the window, nor the song

Of breakers brought me slumber in the night;
For with the dawn I felt uncertain dooms
Gathering, and the sad reluctant sea
Wearily thundered woe. Lovely no more
Thy beauty seemed, but ashes in the bud,
And all thy words unsweet, for evermore
Old Priam rose before me comfortless,
Shaken with age, and jeeringly he cried,
'The son of Antenor may Love forget,
Who hath forgot the ancient love of friends!'

Now, ere the curse strike deeper, I will go;
Late, but the wind is swift to overtake
The Spartan, where he seeks his worthless bride.
I, for a better love, have swifter wings,
And on the plains of Troy shall win again
The first unclouded vision, thee once more,
Cheering me home from deeds of friendly faith,

Lovely as when, returning from the hunt,
I saw thee first, under a happy moon,
Moving like Hera down thy father's lawns,
White-robed, and laughing blessings with thine
eyes.

Lo, even now thy cheeks are rose again,
Flushed with the promise. Ah, remember,
sweet,

Thou art not alone, though lonely, and our
house

Not desolate, like that Lacedæmon home !

At night when we two sit by the warm blaze,
And hear the hungry sea, I think that Love
Stands in the doorway, and no harm comes in.

And when I go, the god himself sits down
Before the empty hearth and keeps the house.

Now Love and thou keep well my house for me ! ”

On her white lips his kiss, and on her cheeks
His warm tears fell, as from her arms he turned
Down to the ship, to the grey wind-combed sea.
On him she fixed her hopeless eyes amazed ;
As when in hell unwelcome Hermes comes,
Earthward to lead Persephone, their queen,
And the wan dead, with infinite despair,
Knowing the woe at hand, the utter gloom,
Watch that fair comfort swiftly borne away.

WINTER SONG TO PAN

PAN sleeps within the forest ! There I heard
Him piping once, there once I heard him shame
The wild bird with his note, but now he sleeps,
Wrapped in the ragged driftings of the snow,
Half-naked to the wind, and by his side
The magic pipes, long fallen from weary hands.

God of the drowsy noon, awake ! awake !
Pipe me a summer tone once more, and pipe
Thy godhead back again. Hast thou forgot
The finger-tips a-tingle on the pipes,
The musing tone a-tremble on the lips,
The sweets divinely breathed, the summer
sweets ?

Hast thou forgot the noonday peace, the touch
Of forest-greenness resting on the world,
The hollow water-tinkle of the brooks,
The startled drone of some low-circling bee?
Once thou didst love the heat, the hushed bird-song,

The rich half-silence, breathing mystery:
It is full-silence now; now bird and bee
Are silent, and the crystal-frozen brooks
That wind mute silver through the land, like
veins

In quarried stone; the forest voice is gone;
Hark to the withered crackle of the leaf
Whose sigh of old was beautiful! The pipes
Of Pan are stopped with icicles, where once
Breath of a god made music. Foolish god!
Thy finger-tips must tingle now with cold,

And only frost be trembling on thy lips. '
Thou art but half a god, and see, the cold
Hath gnawed away thy half-divinity,
And made thee seem all beast! The mocking
chill

Of winter parodies our human grief
In thee; those bitter ice-drops on thy cheek,
Was ever human tear so hard and cruel?
Age cannot touch the gods, but see, the snow
Hath crowned thee whiter than a thousand
years!

All this is for thy sleep! Awake, O Pan!
Breathe on thy pipes again, O bring me back
One summer day, and be the god of old!
Make loud the brook, and rouse the droning
bee,

And come thou to thy kingdom back, and pipe.

I wait for thee, for thee my song I raise,
But at thy waking thou shalt answer me,
And bird and leaf and brook and drowsy noon
Shall meet the wild bee's droning in thy song.
O summer-bringing voice, return, O Pan!

A SONG OF FRIENDS

NOT to the Muse I sing,
Though this high theme of old was wont to bring
On poets' lips the Muse's breath divine,
The fiery flood of song;
But to the heart-uplifting mood,
The winged vision, born of brotherhood,
Of brotherhood the sign —
When friendship looks from loyal eyes
In youth and faith and reverence strong,
And o'er the sight no shadow lies —
To that dear mood I sing, would but its fire
Make equal my weak song with my most high
desire !

I sing of youth the golden loves,
The unspent charm of loyalty
While yet the world is young;
While yet the sensitive impulse moves
At the least breath of memory,
Blown from high peaks of time,
Fragrant with nobility;
And at the low, persuading tongue
Youth eager leaps to make its own
The inheritance sublime,
To live familiar with the flower
Of friendship, wheresoever found
Roman or Greek, or better known,
Arthur and his fair Table Round,
Or him that held his desperate ground
At Roncesvalles, and by his side
His true friend fought and died:

Till frequent memory breed the power
To feel ourselves the ancient mood,
The ageless pulse of brotherhood,
Warmed with the blood of more than mortal
birth;

And the new life impels the youthful heart
To play no unheroic part
With those that bear the love that moves the
earth.

What need have we these glories to recall,
These duties sweet — all noble deeds to hold
In memory, and ourselves to work them all —
We who these duties loved, and made them
ours of old?

But ah, the drooping flight that ease discovers
To lure so soon away the young star-lovers,

When dim the beacons burn and far above,
And the first heaven fades ;
When the near, comfortable earth persuades
Wing-weariness, delaying the heavenward heart
 of love !

So from our early vows are we not turned,
Pondering this other wisdom, ere we know —
“ The rugged peak by every blast is worn,
By heaven's breath the soaring spirit torn ;
For us the sheltered plain, where all winds
 gently blow ” ?

And ever as we pondered, nearer burned
The subtle dream, the bright allure,
Of our unlovely ills the loveless cure,
Dear to the mind, but unaccepted of the soul —
Equality, that perilous cry of France,
That lifts the weak heart out of circumstance,

But bids the rarer spirit be level with the whole !

Have we not bent to this our first desire ?

Making our best achievement, courtesy,

Our friendship but a soft, consistent glow,

Not like the ancient fire

That melted in one league high thoughts and
low,

Silver and costlier gold, alike refined

By love's pure flame, and made one perfect
mind ?

Then one expert in life, in wisdom old,

Found for his love one rich in youth alone,

In springing hope, in new mysterious life,

Unequal friends, yet linked with chains of gold,

And each the other's fortune made his own ;

Then youth, in hunger for all noble strife,

Scanning the battle, thence his Bayard chose,

His generous knight, the hero he would be,
And following, served and worshipped loyally,
Unenvying to what height soe'er he rose,
After his glory large content to glean:
As round the moon, whene'er she rises bright,
Shine on, though overspread of her sweet light,
The faithful stars unchangeable, serene.

Sweet the west wind, that loud the forest thrills,
But stirs the rushes softly; sweet the dew,
Whereof the rose her larger chalice fills,
The violet daintily drinks; and love is fair,
Whose spacious light and song, wide as the air,
Fall as one joy on else-divided lives,
And friendship there strikes noble root and
thrives.

Such friendship Hylas knew:

Hylas the young, whom once Alcides loved,
And seeking him, long over Mysia roved,
The golden quest forsaking;
The impatient Argosy delayed its flight,
Jason delayed, while ever, morn and night,
Alcides roved forlorn, his vain cry making —
“Hylas, O Hylas!” For they two were bound,
The knightly roamer and the tender boy,
In perfect league, as when the climbing vine
Ranges the aged oak with beauty round,
With greenness ever new;
And time divides them not, until he both destroy,
So close the root, the leaf, the branches twine:
So Hylas round Alcides grew,
Himself unstalwart, round the son of Jove,
The wide deliverer, working good for men
In labours fit for gods. Together then

They joined the fifty, all the flower of Greece,
To tempt unwonted fates for dim rewards,
From Colchis, from the isle the dragon guards,
To fetch the golden fleece;

Alcides for renown the venture made,
And Hylas followed him for love.

But when the ship in sheltering Mysia stayed
The shifting of the winds, and twilight fell,
Then came young Hylas to the sacred well,
The Naiads' haunt, by fatal chance he came;
No water thence he drew, but thirst was drawn;
For him the nymphs beheld, like the young dawn
When first it spreads its timid golden flame;
And swift they drew him down, with them to
 dwell.

No more the Argosy delayed its flight,
But seaward sped; while ever, morn and night,

Alcides roved the land from end to end ;
No other quest he sought, but only sought his
friend.

O thou who first the love of man
On men bestowed, once more inspire,
As when all brotherhood began,
The yearning quest, the far desire,
Lest we with peace be satisfied,
Drawn from our only path aside.
Deep in thy power of love remain
A thousand friendships still to give,
And without number is their name,
Young hearts that most by friendship live ;
Of their bright deeds the golden chain
Still binds us to another day ;
Still in their soul the ancient gleam

Burns forward to a starrier dream,
A fairer love for aye.
They drink of love the draught sublime,
They cherish the diviner thirst,
They seek the fountain streams ;
Hope breaks their path where truth shall climb,
And their remotest trail is first
Familiar made by dreams.
Now evermore the dream abide,
Their friendship blossom fairer flowers !
Nor need they other hands to guide,
Nor voice to cheer them need, but ours !
O grant us strength to fail them never,
Never may Hylas lack Alcides' love of old !
So with the heroes, on young lips for ever
Our friendship shall abide in linked names of
gold.

ALMA MATER

SPRING from the valley rises to the hill,
And starts the corn-seed toward the Autumn
sheaf;
From the long silence breaks the robin's trill,
And all the rose-heart flushes to the leaf.
A little shadow finds a hiding brief
In the low places; all the light has flown
With the Spring, hillward, to our Mother's throne.

There on the hill she reigns beside the rose,
And high out-soars the robin's melody,
And at her feet the river slides and flows,
And spreads its waters till they find the sea.
So all the bloom of all the flowers to be,

Into her Springtide flowing, dwells enclaspt ;
So spread the years toward her full bloom at last.

To-day she sets her throne upon the height,
And there a larger dawn breaks o'er her head,
Where from the East the century grows bright.
The rose that once in Omar's garden bled,
Now at her crowning wears a deeper red ;
His bird of wine-song pipes a nobler strain ;
To-day the Queen comes to her own again.

For we have loved her when she was no Queen,
But only trod the 'prentice roads of fame ;
Before her feet the grey land turned to green,
And where she walked the rose broke into
flame,
So swiftly in those days the Summer came,

But now the years together make one Spring,
Where the Queen reigns in one long blossoming.

Not ivy-grown, not overgrown with years,
Nor sadly sweet with thought of battles done ;
Not to be loved like those whom age endears,
Nor praised, like those whose laurels all are
won ;

Still in her youth she puts old wisdom on,
And sends her children proudly on their way,
Who now behold her coronation day.

Not like the birds that Summer calleth home
To build their nests anew ; not like the rose,
Returning yearly to its ancient bloom ;
Nor the rich West, in whose oft-fading glows
Hundreds of days still blossom ere they close ;

We build no more beneath our Mother's crown,
Never take up the life we here lay down;

But as a river, passing to the sea,

Swift to its rest, whence never stream returns,
Slips down between the hills unswervingly,

Yet somewhat falters at the end, half spurns
The hard-worn sea, and landward-bending,
yearns

Toward the high shores, where once the stream
came through,

Toward the strong hills that kept the river true ;

So at the parting time we turn aside,

Not for the wane of purpose nor the lack,
But for the nature of this human tide,

That cannot leave the shore, and not look back
Where she who held us to the seaward track,

Shows forth enthroned against the morning sky,
On the high hills of her own destiny.

Is she not beautiful, our Mother, now?

The light that rested once on Greece of old,
Strikes through the years and dazzles on her
brow,

And shows how her long tresses sink and fold,
Where Truth has set anew his crown of gold ;
While love for many children in her eyes
Makes kind the light of many victories.

Over the sea her flashing glories break,

That sea of hearts, whither her children run,
While all her hopes take wing and outward make,
Swift to the Light of Hope, before whose
throne

All pure things fold their flight and lay them
down.

And there her idle dreams rest secretly,
Till one by one God brings them forth to be.

We cannot leave her, though we say farewell;

No wave can ever seaward drift so far

But to the shore will come again and dwell.

Seaward we go; yet shall the guiding-star

Bring us to port within the harbour-bar

Whence first we came. And on that Mother-
shore

We shall find strength to put to sea once more.

Then O my Mother, in the days to come,

When thy long Spring has touched maturity,

And many a rose has mingled its red bloom

With silver of the robin's song, for thee ;
When many waters have attained the sea,
Till a great ocean rests upon thy shore,
Larger than any sea we travelled o'er ;

Then in thy greatness, make thy children great !
Raise us to thee, whose height we cannot
climb.

And on thy deeds may all God's blessing wait,
And on thy thoughts wait all His truth sublime,
And all thy dreams come true in His good
time.

Then when thy days shall reach eternity,
Great as thou art, so be our love for thee !

I HEARD THE DOOM

I HEARD the doom of this too prosperous
race

From older lips, that honouring much the
past,

Foretold the nation's star declining fast,

Man's will enfeebled and his heart made
base;

Among great empires shall we hold no place,

They said, and worse than chains are round
us cast,

Who, learning wealth, let go the better grace

Of freedom, that the soul would part with
last.

Ah no ! the ancient flame could fire us still,
Watching the Russian halt his cruel lord,
And when Japan her dark foe turned to rout,
It was as if my country raised the sword ;
We hate the tyrant, wear what face he will —
We still are kin to all who cast him out.

ON READING THE SYMPOSIUM

(To George Edward Woodberry)

PLATO, what splendid names I link with thine !

My poets all, who had from thee their dream :
Sweet Spenser first, who of our English line

Love earliest learned and Beauty made his
theme ;

Milton the next, from whom no veiled sun

Could Wisdom hide nor Virtue's lamp remove ;
Then Shelley, heart of hearts ! and nearest, one
Loyal to these, who bred me in their love.

He taught me Shelley, who his own youth nurst,
Taught me the loftier music Milton sings,

Spenser he taught, and thee through these to
trace ;

Now I have felt thee mine, as the eaglet first
Craves the deep heaven, and clothes his heart
with wings

To join the star-wide hunting of his race.

ON A STUDY OF THE TECHNIC OF
SHAKSPERE'S SONNETS

MORE in the meaning of love-given flowers

 Their beauty lies, than in the scent or hue,

And some there are will count it fasting hours

 Only on Shakspeare's art to feast with you ;

Their food is guessing how his life-blood ran,

 As though the elusive spirit who put on

All forms at will of ever-changing man,

 Should leave himself for hawks to feed upon !

He showed us not that barren waste of bloom,

 That full-blown heart the sun-dried daisies wear,

But to out-dawn the far-off break of doom

 He left one early rose, so lasting fair,

Though every hour a petal lift its lid,

Still underneath the leaf the heart is hid.

CATULLUS

WHEN we can sound the ocean from the beach,
Counting how oft the waves rise and return,
Then from thy words, Catullus, we may learn
All thy heart surging on the bounds of speech.
What swift design the lightning-fork would teach,
The startled eye not wholly can discern;
So into sudden words thy sorrows burn,
So darkness has them back beyond our reach.

Had thy love waned, clear were its history;
After the tide the cliff informs the skies
How the majestic waters scarred the stone;
But thou from life passed to proud mystery,
As when a rose escapes the praise of eyes
And all night long blooms to itself alone.

RHYTHMS

POET, you that build the rhyme

Dear to the Muse, the lovable maiden,

Breathe again the beauty-laden

Breath of wisdom's earlier time !

Now the people fancy more

Popular art, sensational poses,

Not the rarer-chosen roses,

Not the laurel Tennyson wore ;

But to you my wreaths belong,

Wrought of Apollo's hyacinth-treasure,

You that tread to every measure

Dainty steps of delicate song.

DE GUSTIBUS

ONE used his pinions eagle-like,
And straight against the sun would rise
And scout among the stars, and strike
His quarry from across the skies;

And one was as the bee that strives
Against no wind, but simply blows
Across the garden, and arrives
Upon an unsuspected rose.

ECHOES

I

THOU on the stars divine
Gazest, O star of mine !
Would that I were the skies,
To gaze on thee with many eyes.

II

A star of dawn thou wast to me ;
Now I have twilight, missing thee :
But O, how bright the spirits are,
Shined on by thee, their evening star !

WITH SAPPHO'S POEMS

BLESSINGS, brave heart, and joy be thine !

And for the wish, one grace I claim,
That this dark Pagan girl of mine,
Whose lips have blossomed sacred flame,
Lips for no idle kisses born,
Should greet you on your birthday morn.

Remember how my spirit wars

For the old giant victories,
Whose battle-banners are the stars ;
Yet seeks no less, with reverent eyes,

The kindred glories that belong
To gracious women and to song.

I loved the Lesbian from the hour
 Young learning showed me, at long reach,
Her beauty with its double flower,
 The woman's heart, the poet's speech —
Loved her far off, and dimly knew;
I found her close at hand in you.

In you — no idle praise; she won
 The first red blossoms for her wreath,
Made Memnon greetings to the sun,
 Sweet with the world's rich morning-breath;
Yet to this twilight-age endures
The memory of her voice in yours.

And for the woman's heart in you —

I know not how to write it here,

Nor my Greek song-girl never knew;

God send a better messenger!

Some clear-eyed angel that attends

The precious, secret thoughts of friends.

WITH A BOOK OF POEMS

DREAMING on birthday thoughts for you,

And searching for a birthday rose,

Where'er the stateliest blossoms grew

Or heaviest perfume hung — I chose

These perfect roses, from the bower

Of knightly Love and noble Art,

Imperishable bloom and flower,

The garden of a poet's heart.

For you these poet-flowers ; I lay

A humble birthday thought in each,

That what I could but rudely say,

May please you in their finer speech ;

As a poor man, at some great court,
Because his own attire is mean,
Borrows a coat of worthy sort
To wear in honour of the Queen.

TO ST. VALENTINE

GREAT voices of the past she knows and loves,
And most of all the poets are her friends,
Such eager kinship in their singing moves,
And to their ancient mood her spirit bends;
Surrey his Geraldine to her makes known,
Sidney's highway of love her heart delights;
The faith her poets held she makes her own,
Nor thee, dear Saint whom Chaucer loved,
she slights.

St. Valentine, this lady be thy care!

The days are evil, and thy service sweet
Uncherished dies from our ungentle race;
Another heart like hers when shalt thou meet?

Happy her fate be ever! With the prayer
Thy day I honour and my lips I grace.

"LOVE THAT NEVER TOLD CAN BE"

No bird hath ever lifted note so clear,

Or poured so prodigal his lyric breast,

But carried still some music from the nest,

When Winter laid the seal of silence there.

No sea hath ever woo'd the shore so fair

But turn of tide left something half expressed ;

Nor true love ever burned so strangely blest

That words could hold it all or heart could hear.

And yet the tide will turn again, and tell

Its sweet persistent story o'er and o'er —

The bird take up the cadence where it fell,

And pipe it towards the ending more and

more —

And only love be inexpressible,

The endless song, the sea that hath no shore.

“FOR NO AFFLICTION”

FOR no affliction of your own you wept,
 Though sometimes 'neath your brightness I
 surmise
 Enough sad secrets in your heart close-kept
 To bid a thousand bitter tears to rise;
 But for the crueller grief that unawares
 Takes the sweet hope of life with harsh surprise,
 In blasted youth or age's wasting cares,
 In beggars' pleadings and their starving eyes.
 “Lo what good company hath wept with you!”
 I thought, to see those tears of pity start;
 “Unto this cause my heroes all were true;
 Of this life-sorrow Virgil felt the smart,
 And Dante knew these tears, and Shelley knew;
 Now with them stands the lady of my heart.”

MORE THAN THE HOPE

LIKE to a merchant rich beyond his hopes

By sudden chance, who yesterday was poor,
And still his mind through deep amazement
gropes,

Nor hardly dares he count such fortune sure ;
Even in sleep he ponders still his bliss ;

Such faithful dreams the golden day renew,
But sweeter than the dream's delight is this —

To wake and find more than he dreamt of true ;

So when I see thee not, still art thou fair ;

I count thy wealth of beauty o'er and o'er,
And still its ancient marvel holds my heart ;
But when I lift my eyes, and thou art there —

I see thee then as though unseen before,

And ponder this anew, " How fair thou art !"

HEART'S DESIRE

ONE seed-time, through the burning
Of love's impassioned Spring;
(The prelude first, for learning
What sweets the song will bring.)

One seed-time, one up-leaping
To the high hope of thee;
One harvest at one reaping,
Thy love come home to me.

No bliss that lightly flowers,
No joy that fades as fast —
The price of patient hours
For thy true love at last.

Far off be love's leave-taking!

The rest for God to keep,

Whether I greet thee waking,

Or dream of thee in sleep.

AN OLD SONG

"Gather therefore the Rose"

SWEET, sweet the hour with thee, and ah, so
swiftly fled !

Too swift, O love, and soon the bliss is sped ;

I lay the burden of an ancient rhyme

Upon this perfect moment of all time :

Sweet, sweet the hour — O sweeter far art thou !

The robin, carolling the noontide through,

Another morn will raise his song anew ;

The burning rose that droops amid your hair,

Another year will bring a rose as fair,

But nothing half so fair as you are now !

The wind that softly whispers overhead,
Will whisper till the dawn of doom grows red ;
The sun that woos the daisy at your feet,
Another hour will find a flower as sweet,
But nothing half so sweet as you are now !

This honeyed hour, this bliss so swift to wane,
Ah, many a man and maid will find again !
No joy, dear heart, of all we call our own —
Save only to be fair — is yours alone,
And only this is mine — to love you now !

“BENEATH THIS BEAUTY”

BENEATH this beauty when my spirit swayeth

And with the praise of it my soul is stirred,

Love on my lips a wary finger layeth

And bindeth in my heart the eager word!

My heart, that for love's sake these long years

holdeth

One dear desire to win all ways of speech,

Whose secret, love himself, I dreamed, un-

foldeth —

O, is it silence, Love, that thou wouldst teach?

I have desired to suffer thy sweet burning

And prayed thy fiercest blow should on me
fall;

I have grown scarred and wise in bitter learning,
But not to love I never learned at all.

Now to thy mischief, Love, add not this choice—
To know not love, or never use love's voice.

PARTING

NOT in thine absence, nor when face
 To face, thy love means most to me,
But in the short-lived parting-space,
 The cadence of felicity.

So music's meaning first is known,
 Not while the bird sings all day long,
But when the last faint-falling tone
 Divides the silence from the song.

IN LUMINE PERPETUO

How could'st thou know this world is sometimes
drear,

Who in thyself art more than earthly light?
To thee alone the darkness comes not near;
Only the sun has never looked on night.

IN ABSENCE

NOT without light, though sun and earth must
part,

And dark hours close between like prison-
bars;

In the dead night of my more sunless heart

Thy smiles remembered shall break through
like stars.

TREE OF LIFE

IN myriad hues the buds of hope broke fair ;
Midsummer flowers of fortune clothed the tree ;
Now in the wind of fate each branch is bare :
Patience, the rugged stock, abide with me !

FAITH

IF the star trembles, shaken with the dark,

'T is thy weak sight that wavers, not the star:

Where the stars shine most clear fix not thy
mark, —

The faintest stars nearest to heaven are.

"LOVE, THE WINGED LORD"

LOVE, the winged lord of art,
That all sweet song inspires,
First-fruits from the gentle heart
Evermore requires.

Not in every field he sows,
Never sows he long,
But the swiftest path he goes
Blossoms into song.

Catch the flying seed who may,
Ere the god go by;
Little love has come my way —
Little song have I.

FUTILITY

THE west wind sings to the rose :

“ Vain is the breath of the wind

That tastes the sweet of the rose,

And leaves the rose behind !

Over thy flower or beneath it,

What if I linger or stand ?

Soon to thy lover's heart I must breathe it

And bend thee low to his hand.”

To the river sings the shore :

“ Vainer than this to me,

The rivers that kiss the shore

And yet are lost in the sea !

Vainly the worn river-hollow,
While the changing tides flow past,
Waits for a faithful lover to follow
And dwell in her heart at last."

THE TWO SOULS

Two souls passed out beyond the eastern skies
Bowed down to faintness by the cruel weight,
The ancient sad discovery, of hate
Under love's kiss, and mortals 'neath the guise
Of gods; but hope gave one far-searching eyes,
And one despair half-blinded. So the gate
Of death closed on them, and alike in fate,
Unwittingly they fared toward Paradise.
Now where the angel guards the sacred place
With flaming sword, they came, and in the
cease
Of sorrow slowly, wonderingly drew near;
One, with eyes raised to the celestial face,
Knowing it for an angel's, went in peace,
But one beheld the sword, and went in fear.

THE OLD HOUSE

UNFLAGGING still the home's deep pulses beat,
The voices dear, the constant murmur sweet
Of happy tasks and footsteps to and fro,
The earnest talk, the songs, the laughter low;
But oft at evening would my heart be free
From solemn questions what this house will be
In days too near, when this familiar door
We sadly close, and open it no more.
Fair lies the path, though fortune lead us far;
No backward wish the prosperous moment mar
When 'neath strange skies another hearth we
 light!
But here were joys that ne'er can seem so bright,

And for life's simpler sorrows, strength and cheer,
And once the darker Shadow touched us here :
So true a home, whate'er new fates may bring,
Lived in so long, some deep roots still must cling,
Some grace of life we cannot take away.
Henceforth whoever 'neath this roof shall stay,
Shall find old customs gently on him laid,
And unaccounted bliss his heart invade.
Or if for us a kindlier fate should be,
Once more the face of this old house to see,
And stung with keen regret, we find these halls
An empty shell, this home but soulless walls —
Still for our eyes the lifeless face shall keep
Familiar lines of love, by time carved deep.

NOEL: A MYSTERY

(To Rhoda)

THE ANGEL

THE TWO CHILDREN

THE SHEPHERDS

The scene is a field, just before dawn

THE ANGEL

Now half the night a lonely watch I keep
Over this flock, that huddling shepherdless,
Untimely roused by our unusual song,
Suffer the dark and breathe far off the dawn.
Patience, weak hearts! The shepherds soon
return

From David's City, where they seek the Child.
Nay, long ere now the Manger-Born they find, —

His face beholding they learn Mystery;
While round His cradle all those Voices stand
Of God, the multitude that suddenly
With the first angel were — save me alone;
Me the Archangel gave this lesser task —
Not to adore the new Light of the World,
Yet service still, as most He wills to serve —
And promise made of other guerdon mine:
“On this night shall the world find love,” he said,
“And without love henceforth shall no thing be,
So Love has willed. When our strange tidings
stir

The slow minds of these watchers in the field,
Wonderful hunger for this Peace on Earth
Shall drive them thoughtless from the unguarded
flock;

But when they see the Child, the Mystery,

A keen remembrance of some common act
Of love undone, shall urge each home again ;
Such simple ways Love knows to teach the heart.
Our tidings given, in Bethlehem shall we too
Find the Bright Leader in His sweet disguise ;
But one must fold his wings, his glory dim.
And in the field shadow the flock unseen,
Lest any wandering harm invade this night ;
Yet since this humble watch for all were hard —
For who this lonely station holds, the Child
He cannot seek — to him the Child will come.”
So the Archangel spoke, and me he chose.

Now half the night I watch ; now the first
stroke

Of day shakes darkness into rosy seas
Of paling gloom, — and still the vision fails —
No Child, no Mystery, only timid sheep

With pitiful eyes that look up and are dumb;
So much of human sorrow I have known —
Even for a season from the place of love
Exiled, and my consoling hope put off.

Whose are these footsteps that climb stum-
bling up, —

These innocent voices, as none evil use?
This brightness I will hide, and know their words.

*(The Angel disappears. The two children
enter, carrying a basket)*

FIRST CHILD

Can you see, brother? Is this the place?

SECOND CHILD

I think so :

The furthest hill, he said, in the last field,
It must be near; perhaps the fire burns low

They have to warm them. See, the light begins;
Just before daybreak, Father said to come;
The men are hungry after the long night.

FIRST CHILD

I'd rather watch all night here with the stars
Than get up, still in the night, and hungry too,
To bring their food, if we find where they are.

SECOND CHILD

We *must* find where they are; if we are late
Father will beat us.

FIRST CHILD

When we saw that glow
Above this place, I thought it was a fire
And Father would be sitting with the men,
But there is no fire here.

SECOND CHILD

We ought to find

Ashes at least.

FIRST CHILD

Why see, here is the flock!

Look, they are standing, and all huddled close!

They must be frightened. Do you think they see

Some wild beast prowling? O, I am afraid!

SECOND CHILD

Don't be afraid — there is no wild beast here;

Some flying thing, perhaps, has frightened

them —

They shiver as they did a year ago

When the big eagle carried off the lamb.

FIRST CHILD

I thought I heard the whirr of moving wings.

When we came up. An eagle has flown by.

SECOND CHILD

O brother, here is where the fire was! See,
The ashes are quite cold — they have not burned
For hours — the men have gone and left the
flock!

FIRST CHILD

Where have they gone? They would not leave
the flock!

Only Father would — O, do you think
They have carried Father away for quarrelling so?

SECOND CHILD

I thought of that; last night when he went out
He was half drunk — he said he would beat us
both;

When he is drunk he quarrels with the men,
Sometimes he strikes them too, — so the last
time

They told him he had better not come back;
They could not trust him with the sheep again.

FIRST CHILD

What will they do to him?

SECOND CHILD

I do not know.

FIRST CHILD

Why does he quarrel with them? O, I wish
He would not drink! He would not beat us then.

SECOND CHILD.

Until Mother was dead he never drank,
Nor ever struck me once; but after that,
When you grew up, he beat us both alike.

FIRST CHILD

What was he like before Mother was dead?

SECOND CHILD

He used to talk with Mother and play with me
And hold me on his knees and laugh and smile.
Then after you were born, when Mother sat
Holding you in her arms and gazing down,
Father would hold me too and watch you both;
He would smile then, but hardly say one word.
Then Mother grew quite ill and thin and pale;
Her eyes seemed larger—they were always
 dark,
Her hair was black, too, over her white face;
Still she would sit, holding you in her arms
And gazing down; sometimes she would look up
And try to smile—but only with her lips;
Her large eyes were too sad. When she smiled
 so,
Father's big hands that kept me on his knees

Would grip my arms suddenly till they hurt.
When Mother died he drank, and then he beat
us.

FIRST CHILD

He will beat us for the breakfast that he missed
If he comes back.

SECOND CHILD

I hope he will come back;
The shepherds would not hurt him or hide him
away
When he was drunk!

FIRST CHILD

They are coming now — I hear them!
(The shepherds enter in haste)

FIRST SHEPHERD

The flock are here! They have not stirred a
step!

SECOND SHEPHERD

No work of ours ! Strange watch we kept this
night —

The wolf might have them all four hours ago !
Hark, what is that ? My heart beats fearfully
And finds a wonder in the merest sound ;
After that sudden Voice all sounds are strange.

FIRST SHEPHERD

Why, here are your boys, neighbour, waiting for
you !

Why, they are frightened as the sheep !

THIRD SHEPHERD

My boys !

SECOND CHILD

O Father, then they let you come back again !
I am so glad !

THIRD SHEPHERD

Let me come back again?

Who let me?

SECOND CHILD

Why — we thought — we thought you quar-
relled

With the men, and they had carried you away.

FIRST SHEPHERD

Neighbour, that boy of yours knows your deserts!

If all things were not overturned this night

You might have had them. When that song
began

Of peace on earth, it came at a strange time,

With you too ugly almost to be borne.

When the light broke it made that face of
yours

Look ten times blacker. Those bright messengers

Were brave to sing to you!

THIRD SHEPHERD

Say what you will.

Open the basket, Child, and let us eat;

Come sit here on my knee.

FIRST CHILD

You will not beat us,

Father? We came in time — you were not here.

THIRD SHEPHERD

Child — Child! You need not be afraid.

Come, on my knee! Your brother is too big —

I used to hold him so.

SECOND SHEPHERD

Neighbour, your boy —

The young one — has the very eyes and hair, —

I see it as you hold him, — of the Child,
Such large eyes, such dark hair !

SECOND CHILD

What child, Father?

THIRD SHEPHERD

A child I saw this night.

FIRST CHILD

O tell me, Father, —

I like stories.

THIRD SHEPHERD

Stories ! Nay, a dream

The cunning heart of Joseph might have framed,
Or only that wise Daniel could unfold,
Not I. I heard the song and saw the Child,
And then — I felt the sting that David found
In Nathan's story of the slaughtered lamb —

“Thou art the man.” Yet no one spoke to me,
Only the messengers that sang of peace.

FIRST SHEPHERD

Some of that sting I felt, but not at first;
At first when the strange Voices suddenly
Turned your bold quarrelling, neighbour, into
fear,
Yet bade us all fear not but find the Child,
I thought, the City of David is not far —
The great folk that are come up from all lands
Have filled the inn — some princely child is there;
So we shall see the city at its best,
Even at this hour. I thought not of the flock.
But when I saw that Child in the poor straw,
And there we knelt, all three, nothing to say —
I would not cross a field, I thought, for this,

And all the while a wolf may get the sheep.
I felt the sting then, so I hurried back.

SECOND SHEPHERD

I felt no sting; I would cross all the world
To see the Child again.

THIRD SHEPHERD

And so would I!

FIRST CHILD

What child was it you saw in the poor straw?

SECOND SHEPHERD

A child strange messengers sent us to find.
Out of the midnight sky a great dawn broke,
And a voice singing flooded us with song.
In David's City was He born, it sang,
A Saviour, Christ the Lord. Then while I sat
Shivering with the thrill of that great cry,

A mighty choir a thousandfold more sweet
Suddenly sang, Glory to God, and Peace —
Peace on the earth; my heart, almost unnerved
By that swift loveliness, would hardly beat.
Speechless we waited till the accustomed night
Gave us no promise more of sweet surprise ;
Then scrambling to our feet, without a word
We started through the fields to find the Child.

FIRST CHILD

It must have been a King !

SECOND SHEPHERD

No King at all —

That was most strange. The Child was very
poor,
Born in a stable; on a bed of straw
The Mother sat and held him in her arms;

An ox near by kept blinking at the torch
We had to see them by; a stupid sheep
On the other side held its head down and gazed.

SECOND CHILD

What was the Mother like?

SECOND SHEPHERD

She was very pale
And thin; her eyes were large and dark and
sad,
Her hair was black too, over her white face.
She never spoke; she only sat there holding
The Child tight in her arms and gazing down;
Once she looked up and smiled.

FIRST CHILD

O Father, don't!
Don't grip my arms so hard — you hurt!

SECOND CHILD

Father,

I know why you came back!

THIRD SHEPHERD

What do you know?

It is mystery, child. Come — let us go home.

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